

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-13 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05

H-01 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02

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FM AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1558

INFO AMEMBASSY COTONOU

AMEMBASSY CONAKRY

AMEMBASSY BRAZZAVILLE

AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

AMEMBASSY LAGOS

AMEMBASSY LOME

AMEMBASSY MONROVIA

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE

USMISSION GENEVA

USICA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L LIBREVILLE 2290

EUMO. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PEPR, GB, DM

SUBJECT: BENIN SITUATION

REF: LIBREVILI 2257 (NOTAL)

1. ARTICLE IN LIBREVILLE DAILY L'UNION AUG 22 QUOTES GENERAL NKOMAH, COMMANDER IN CHIEF OF GENDARMERIE, AS STATING THAT REPATRIATION OF BENINESE WAS PRACTICALLY COMPLETED AUG 20, WITH FLIGHT OF LAST CHARTER AIRCRAFT PROVIDED BY TRAN-INTERNATIONAL CK-FYS (58-).

2. STILL QUOTING NKOMAH, ARTICLE STATES THAT 10,243 BENINESE HAVE BEEN REPATRIATED, OF WHICH LARGE MAJORITY, ACCORDING L'UNION, PAID THEIR OWN WAY HOME. ARTICLE CITUI FBENA, IBERIAN AIRWAYS, CONFIDENTIAL

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CAMEROON AIRLINES, UTA AND TIA AS HAVING PROVIDED CHARTERS AND PARTIILARLY COMPLIMENTED CAMEROON AIRLINES FOR SPECIAL EFFORT OVER WEEKEND OF AUG 13. CURIOSLY, AIR AFRIQUEMYAS NOT LISTED AMONG AIRLINES, DESPITE HAVING PUT ON EXTRA FLIGHTS. THESE MAY, HOWEVER, NOT HAVE BEEN CONSIDERED AS CHARTERS.

3. GENDARMERIE IS QUOTED AS STATING THAT BENINESE FROM OYEM,

LAMBARENE, PORT GENTIL AND LIBREVILLE HAVE BEEN ALMOST COMPLETELY REPATRIATED. AN ESTIMATED 37 ARE STILL AT NOJOLE, AND THERE ARE STILL A FEW IN LIBREVILLE WHO HAVE FOUND ASYLUM WITH GABONESE AND FOREIGN FRIENDS.

4. COMMEMH: PHYSICAL ACT OF REPATRIATION, EXCEPT FOR FEW STRAYS, IS THEREFORE OVER, AND LIBREVILLE HAS REVERTED TO ITS NORMAL POST-NATIONAL DAY TORPOR. PRESIDENT HAS EVE GONEMLO FRANCEVILLE FO "VACATION." POLITICAL PROBLEM, OF COURSE, STILL REMAINS, BUT WE SUSPECT THAT WITH BENINESE NOW GONE, PRESSURE TO EFFECT RECONCILIATION WILL DIE DOWN UNTIL SUCH TIME AS ONE OR OTHER OF KEREKOU OR BONGO CHOXS TO MAKE ISSUE OF ITOAGAIN. PRIMARY EFFORTS OF RECONCILIATION CAME FROM GUINEA AND OAU PSELF. WE SHOULD BE INTERESTED TO SEE WETHER EITHER ONE WILL NOW PURSUE THEIR EFFORTS AND WOULD BE GRATEFUL FOR ANYTHING CONAKRY OR ADDIS MIGHT PICK UP IN COURSE OF NORMAL BUSINESS.

5. WHOLE AFFAIR WAS MOST REGRETTABLE. WE DO NOT KNOW WHY KEREKOU CHOSE RE-OPEN EVENTS OF JANUARY 1977 AT KHARTOUM, BUT FROM HERE IT APPEARS TO US TO HAVE BEEN ILL-CONSIDERED MOVE. BONESE, FOR THEIR PART, OVERREACTED BADLY, PARTICULARLY THOSE OFFICIALS WHO WERE NOT AT KHARTOUM. AR DO NOT YET KNOW DEGREE TO WHICH BONGO HIMSELF TRIGGER ORIGINAL UPRISING IN LIBREVILLE, BUT TEND BELIEVE THAT WHAT HE HAS SAID PUBLICLY, I.E., THAT HE WOULD HAVE PREFERRED RESOLVE PROBLEM POLITICALLY, MAY BE CLOSE TO TRUTH. BY TIME HE RETURNED TO LIBREVILLE FROM KHARTOUM, CONFIDENTIAL

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HOWEVER, HE WAS FACED WITH VIRTUAL FACT ACCOMPLI THAT POLITICALLY HE COULD NOT REVERSE. AS FOR ACTULY DETENTION AND REPATRIATION, GABONESE LET IT GO ON TOO LONG ON RESUMABLY IN FORLORN HOPE THAT EITHER KEREKOU WOULD TAKE SOME ACTION TO GET HIS PEOPLE BACK, OR COUNTRIES FRIENDLY TO GABON WOULD HELP, NEITHER OF WHICH HAPPENED. TENSIONS AT LYCEE DE L'ESTUAIRE CAW MEANWHILE BUILT UP AND EVENTUALLY EXPLODED IN AT LEAST TWO BAD INCIDENTS, WICH PROBABLY ARE SOURCE OF MOST STORIES NOW BEING TOLD IN COTONOU. WHEN GABON FINALLY BEGAN CHARTER AIRCRAFT BENINESE COULD SEE LIGHT AT END OF TUNNEL.? TENSIONS DIED DOWN QUICKLY AND REPATRPITION WENT SMOOTHLY.

6. CONDITIONS AT CAMP ITSELF WERE PROBABLY AS GOOD AS COULD BE EXPECTED IN CIRCUMSTANCES NEITHER FOOD NOR SANITATION BECAME MAJOR PROBLEMS TO OUR KNOWLEDGE, AND INDEED SOME BENINESE WERE ALLOWED CIRCULATE IN LIBREVILLE. FORTUNATELY, BENINESE COMMUNITY AS A GROUP WERE RELATIVELY WELL OFF FINANCIALLY. MANY PAID THEIR OWN WAY HOME AND/OR COULD AFFORD PURCHASE SUCH FOOD AS THEY WANTED. NONETHELESS, THERE WERE CERTAINLY TENSIONS WHICH EVENTUALLY LED TO SOME CASUALTIES, INCLUDING AT LEAST THREE DEAD WHEN GABONESE SECURITY FORCES ACTED TO RESTORE ORDER, AND THERE PROBALY WERE SOME CASES OF AN EXCESS OF ZEAL VIS-A-VIS

PERSONAL PROPERTY ON PART OF THOSE RESTORING ORDER, AS REPATRIATES HAVE BEEN REPORTING. THERE WAS NO EVIDENCE OF ANY ORGANIZED GABONESE EFFORT TO HARASS BENINESE AT CAMP, HOWEVER. INDEED, EVIDENCE IS THE OTHER WAY. PRIMARILY, GABONESE WANTED BENCDSE OUT ONCE ORIGINAL DIE WAS CAST, AND THEY DID MAKE SOME EFFORT TO TRY AND INSURE THAT BENINESE IN CAMP WERE FED, HOUSED AND UN-MOLESTED. THEY ALSO PERMITTED BENINESE TO TAKE WITH THEM WHATEVER PERSONAL PROPERTY THEY COULD CARRY.

7. IMPACT ON LOCAL SCENE STILL REMAIN BE EVALUATED, AND THIS WILL TAKE SOME TIME. AS REPORTED EARLIER, BENINESE PLAYED NO SMALL ROLE IN LIBREVILLE ECONOMY, PARTICULARLY AS SMALL SHOPKEEPERS. THERE WERE ALSO CONSIDERABLE NUMBERS OF PROFESSIONAL PEOPLE, ESPECIALLY TEACHERS. WE DO NOT KNOW YET HOW MANY ARE STILL HERE, CONFIDENTIAL

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AND THUS WHAT ULTIMATE IMPACT OF REPATRIATION WILL HURN OUT TO BE. THERE ONE AREA, HOWEVER, WHERE GABONESE WILL HAVE TO BE PARTICULARLY PRUDENT. ACTION AGAINST BENINESE SENT SHUDDERS UP SPINES OF OTHER AFRICAN EXPRIATE COMMUNITIES, WHO BEGAN TO WONDER WHETHER THEY WOULD BE NEXT. GOG WILL DO WELL TO MAKE SPECIAL EFFORT TO REASSURE THEM. ON INTERNATIONAL FRONT, BONGO FOUND OUT HARD WAY THAT SYMPATHIZERS, EVEN AMONG BEST FRIENDS, WERE FAR AND FEW BETWEEN. INDEED, NO ONE RESPONDED TO GABONESE APPEAL FOR HELP ON GOVERNMENT-TO-GOVERNMENT BASIS, EVEN TO EXTENT OF ALLOWING REPATRIATES TO LAND IN NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES AND PROCEED OVERLAND TO BENIN. (EXCEPT FOR BRIEF PERIOD IN NIGERIA). HOPEFULLY, HE WILL HAVE LEARNED A LESSON AND CONCLUDED THAT DAYS WHEN AFRICAN COUNTRIES CAN EXPEL WHOLE NATIONALITIES WITHOUT UNFAVORABLE PUBLICITY. EOVER. ITENKEN

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